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DEPARTMENT FOR OES/EGC FOR TTALLEY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: INAUGURATION OF COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE BY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) Summary: On February 10, in a well-attended ceremony, the Nigerian House of Representatives inaugurated a new Committee on Climate Change (CCC). In his inaugural address, Committee Chair Ezuiche Ubani declared that his committee will provide oversight and the legal framework for the Nigerian Government's (GON) response to climate change. The Committee will outline its agenda items for 2009 after a broad consultation with all stakeholders and invited inputs from all. Speaker of the House Dimeji Bankole criticized developed nations for creating the current difficult climatic problems. He suggested that stricter legislation will be enacted to stop multinational oil firms from flaring gas. Newly appointed Minister of Environment, Housing, and Urban Development John Odey indicated that the GON plans to introduce carbon tax on petroleum consumption in the near future. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In his inaugural address, Committee Chair Ezuiche Ubani (Peoples Democratic Party, Abia State) declared that his committee will provide oversight and legal framework for the GON response to climate change. He underscored that climate change is "no longer an abstract concept but a reality that is impacting the daily lives of Nigerians in all corners of the country" and outlined desertification and desert encroachment in the north and gas flaring and deforestation in the south as the main challenges. The Chairman stated that without addressing these challenges it is impossible for Nigeria to meet the needs of its growing population and achieve its developmental aspirations.

¶3. (U) Keynote speaker British High Commissioner Bob Dewar declared the creation of the Committee as timely and stressed the vulnerability of Nigeria to increasing desertification and rising sea level. He contended that unless addressed effectively these could lead to potential conflicts and instability over shrinking land and water resources and create environmental refugees. Nigeria should use its status as the "giant" of Africa to find sustainable solutions to climate change and lead by example. Dewar said that the new legislative committee needs to be complemented by the creation of a department within the GON that focuses on implementation of energy and climate change initiatives.

¶4. (U) John Odey, newly appointed Minister of Environment, Housing, and Urban Development noted Nigeria's vulnerability to climate change and pointed out that his ministry will embark on new initiatives to raise public awareness about the challenges of climate change and educate the public on adaptation methods, such as energy saving strategies and the benefits of using renewable energy sources and technologies. He stated that the GON plans to introduce carbon tax on petroleum consumption in the near future. (Comment: the Minister did not elaborate what the likely elements of this plan will be. The U.S. Mission will follow up and report septel. End Comment).

¶5. (U) In his closing remarks, Speaker of the House Dimeji Bankole criticized the developed world for causing "damage to the climate during the industrial revolution." He lamented that despite this

historical fact, Nigeria and the rest of the developing world are now told to adapt a "green" economy while they are struggling to catch up with the developed world. Nonetheless, the Speaker acknowledged that climate change is real, and that the establishment of the new committee is the House's response to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on the daily lives of Nigerians. As a first step, Bankole said that stricter legislation will be enacted to stop multinational oil firms from flaring gas. In closing he decried this year's budgetary allocation of \$1.5 million to the new committee as woefully inadequate, including putting doubt to the Committee's ability to participate in the Copenhagen Conference on Climate in December.

COMMENT:

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¶5. (SBU) The inauguration of the House Committee on Climate Change is a positive sign showing the House's commitment to mitigate the impact of climate change. Although a range of environmental challenges were recognized, there was no serious mention of the impact rising sea levels would have on coastal cities and communities in the Delta region. Minister Odey's planned initiatives to educate the public about climate change, its impact, and adaptation strategies are practical steps that will have the greatest immediate benefits in mitigating the impact of climate change in Nigeria. Speaker Bankole's rhetoric about past misdeeds by the developed world sheds some light on the GON's thinking in formulating negotiating strategies for the December Copenhagen Climate Conference and beyond.

¶6. This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

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